

CHAPTER 7

“Sneaking around in secret”

“**T**his court is adjourned.”

“Thank you, your Honor,” Marie said.

Jason Lord rushed to the plaintiff’s table; it was time to make his intentions clear to the attractive attorney before she left the courtroom. Even though he was at least ten years her senior, he never had a problem getting women.

“Excuse me, counselor, that was one heck of a closing remark, I might have to borrow it sometime, with your permission of course,” he said.

“Thank you, but I’m afraid you’ll have to come up with your own summaries, mine aren’t easily duplicated.”

“I see, maybe you wouldn’t mind giving me a lesson?”

“I’m not much of a teacher.”

“But I’m a good student.”

“Are you flirting with me, Mr. Lord?”

“Yes, I mean no! Of course not, not that there would be anything wrong with asking you...I just thought...could we just get a cup of coffee?”

“Sorry, I really can’t, I have another appointment, but thanks for the offer.” Marie began gathering her things. She laughed about the coincidence of Audrey asking her to investigate Jason’s father’s will the day before.

“If I was asking you out on a date, and you weren’t busy, would you go?”

“Why should I? Don’t answer that, withdrawn.”

“All right counselor, here is my card, when you find a little time and feel like talking, give me a call.”

“I might do that,” Marie said, but didn’t mean.

She smiled pleasantly, slightly flattered. She knew Jason was taking in her shapely body and gorgeous legs. As she walked toward the swinging doors, her gait turned heads.

“Miss Perry?” A voice called from across the room.

Marie stopped abruptly. She recognized Marlene’s high-pitched tone and wondered what snide remark she’d end up ignoring.

Marlene shuffled toward Marie in her usual manner, stiff, like a board was nailed to her back. The court’s stenographer was the oldest, young woman Marie had ever known. She was sure Marlene had never seen the inside of a beauty salon. She wore a careless Afro, no make-up and clothing that could have come from

her grandmother's closet.

"I see you've mesmerized another one. Funny how the men around here seem to target you," she said in a loud whisper.

Marie studied her. A frown appeared. "What are you getting at?"

"I think it might have something to do with the way you dress. You've got that available look."

"Excuse me?" Marie sat her things in a chair. "What is it with you, Marlene? You seem to be obsessed with my appearance. I'm beginning to think you may be jealous," Marie concluded.

"Please." Marlene rolled her eyes, as if the remark couldn't be true.

"No, really. I usually ignore your rude comments, but it's starting to get out of hand. Why are you doing this?" Marie asked.

"It's not what I'm doing, but what you're doing."

Marie sighed. It occurred to her she would get nowhere with Marlene and decided on a new approach. "I thought you were a Christian, Marlene. Is this the way you represent the Lord?" Marie asked.

"How are you, of all people, gonna bring the Lord into this? Women are supposed to keep themselves covered."

"The Bible never said I'm supposed to wear mammy-made dresses and collars so high, I can't breathe. My dress code has always been decent and in order."

"According to you."

"And millions of other Christians," Marie informed.

“Don’t you think the Lord wants us to look good for Him? Not only that, if my appearance were tired, run-down and lifeless, do you think anyone would listen to me talk about Jesus? The first thing they’d want to know is why the Lord hasn’t been good to me.”

“You can’t manipulate people with fancy clothes and a halfway decent body, then ask them if they’re saved, Marie.”

“You’ve got it all wrong. The Lord has blessed me; I intend to use what I have to glorify Him. There’s nothing wrong with that, Marlene.”

“Well, whatever, it’s still not right. Anyway, today is my last day. I’m getting married.” Marlene held out her finger for Marie to observe her modest little engagement ring.

“Well, good for you. But why are you quitting?” Marie asked.

“The Bible says the man is the head of the household. It’s his job to provide.” She looked down. “We don’t believe I should work,” she said.

“We?” Marie asked, her eyebrow rose. Instead of giving Marlene a lecture on marriage, she decided to offer her blessings before she departed.

Marie hurried down the concrete stairs of the courthouse. At the crossing signal, she waited for a flash of green, as men passed and nodded their heads. A tall suited brother waited beside her. He was all teeth and gums, ready to put the mack down when the light finally changed. She gave a smile without parting her lips

and hurried across the street.

Marlene was still on her mind. She thought of the many people who are confused about what God expects from his children. Crossing Birch to her office, she wondered why people focused on trivial matters like what to wear and eat, instead of more important aspects of Christianity, like, faith, forgiveness, how to treat and love one another.

She felt a pang of guilt. The Holy Spirit reminded her of how she justified herself to Marlene. *“If my appearance were tired, run-down and lifeless, do you think anyone would listen to me talk about Jesus?”* She realized it had been a while since she approached anyone to specifically talk about Jesus and realized she’d have to change that.

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Jason was certainly no stranger to Marie. Everyone knew about the families’ prestigious law firm and massive wealth. From time to time, she’d spot him around town; in the courtroom, at a restaurant or two, but she never expected he would ask her out.

Within days of their brief encounter, Jason sent a summer bouquet to her office. Shortly after, a perfume basket arrived and a couple of invitations, including one to the philharmonic. While flattered, but declined his gifts and offers after vowing to avoid the distracting practice of dating, at least until after she’d been in her practice for two years.

At one point, she thought accepting his invitations could have given her the opportunity to get to know him without alerting him to her investigation, but doing so would've had her facing entrapment charges, she dismissed the thought.

Marie looked forward to working the case; it was the type of suit she imagined all through law school. High profile, with a big payday; a case that would do more than right a wrong or send someone to jail, but make a statement, set a precedent.

Upon passing the BAR, Marie decided to live and work in Oakridge while her legal eagle friends moved to the big cities where the serious money was. She could have moved anywhere; her ties in Oakridge weren't binding, but she made a challenge out of most everything she did; Otherwise, it didn't seem quite worth it.

When Marie opened her practice, everyone told her she was crazy to think she could run a successful downtown law firm where the Lords monopolized the market. The local banks had even denied her loan application; they said it wasn't prudent business, based on the location of the Lord's firm. But, Marie was determined and used the nest egg left by her parents to start her own practice. Whenever she was put in a position to sink or swim, she'd always come up an Olympic medalist.

Like most businesses starting out, things were slow; she had to build a client base from scratch. Surprisingly, a good portion of her new clients were referred by the Lord Firm; people they didn't want to represent or who frowned on their retainer. As

part of her marketing plan, Marie offered free representation on misdemeanors only for one full month. Instantly, she gained twenty-seven new clients. It wasn't just about business, being good-natured helped her establish a fine reputation and some paying clients. In a year's time, most people were either represented by public defenders, the Lord Firm or The Law Offices of Marie Perry.

It was truly a place of business. Marie was in court almost every day of the week while her receptionist/administrative assistant and best friend, Grace, ran the office. She was also a part time student at the local university studying law, but more importantly, she was everything her resume had described. A computer-literate, friendly, reliable, self-starter, just what Marie was looking for.

They were the same age, 38. Grace was a voluptuous size 14 and proud of every inch. They were both single, but Grace was always in hot pursuit of a man, although she was seeing someone.

Between work, school, his job and his wife, Grace and her beau squeezed in as many stolen moments as possible. The indiscretion made her feel cheap like a disposable product: easy to find, easy to use, easy to discard. Besides being out of favor with God, there were other problems. The man was old enough to be her father and many times, her affair felt, well, incestuous.

There was no physical attraction on her part, Grace had to pretend he was desirable. She constantly worried about their protection holding up because she couldn't decide which was

worse, a sexually transmitted disease or pregnancy. When she weighed the two, the disease could be cleared up if it didn't kill her, but motherhood, before her law degree, would kill her. To let her tell it, becoming an attorney was the most important thing in her life, so she continued.

“Whatever happened to that guy, Kareem Johnson? I thought he was really interested in the position,” Grace asked.

“Oh, he is. I just spoke with him yesterday; he's coming from Atlanta for an interview today.”

“And you're just now telling me? Girl, you're lucky I had a hair appointment yesterday.” Miss Clairol's Auburn spilled over her smooth complexion. She tucked the bouncy shoulder-length mane behind one ear. “I may need to go home and change; what will I wear?” Her cheek rested in her hand.

“What you have on now,” Marie told her.

“What!”

“You heard me.”

“Wait a minute, I know that look, what else did the two of you talk about?” Grace pried.

“Girl, if you don't get your mind out the gutter. We had a nice conversation,” Marie blushed.

“Mmm Hmmph, yeah right.”

“It's true, but check this out, I offered him a ride from the airport, but he insisted he'd get here on his own. He said if he can make it a few thousand miles, he might as well come all the way, said something about no half-stepping.”

“Oh, he did? Hmmph! Sounds like somebody I’d like to date,” Grace admitted.

“Oh, no you don’t! This one is off limits to the both of us, no office romances,” Marie said with a serious tone. “But you know, I practically hired him right over the phone.”

“No, you didn’t, girl,” Grace said in disbelief.

“From what I can understand, the man is super qualified and if he’s everything he says he is, we’ll have us a new attorney. I just hope he doesn’t take one look at our little office and turn around,” Marie said.

“No, he’ll take one look at his boss and try to make partner,” Grace laughed.

“Girl, you are so crazy. Speaking of new people, a friend of my aunt’s is going to be working with us. She’ll start in a couple of days. Her name is Audrey Miner, she’s...” The phone interrupted her.

“Law Office,” Grace answered in a cheerful tone. “Yes Sir...that’s correct...we look forward to meeting you too...all right then, we’ll see you then...bye. That was him, Mr. Johnson, he’s on his way, and he sounds goood,” Grace said.

“Okay, I’ll be in my office, I’ll fill you in on Audrey later,” Marie said.

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“Hell-oooo, you must be Kareem Johnson, Miss Perry is

expecting you. I'm the one you spoke with on the phone, won't you have a seat?" Grace eyed Kareem up and down before she caught herself and stopped.

"Thank you; it's a pleasure meeting you."

"Like wise. By the way, I'm Grace, I do everything around here except practice law." She threw her hair back and gave him the eye. Can I get you coffee?" Her tone was naturally seductive.

"Thanks, but I prefer tea, if you have it." Kareem ignored her flirtation.

"I believe I can arrange that. So, how was your trip?" Grace plopped a tea bag in a mug that labeled the practice.

"It was a pretty cool flight; I slept most of the way."

"Excuse me, Miss Perry just buzzed me," she told him.

Kareem stood to excuse her.

Marie could hardly wait for Grace to get past the door; she grabbed her arm and pulled her into her office. "So, tell me, what's he like?" She begged.

"Well, he's definitely a gentleman, he has a good personality and he's tall..."

"What's wrong with him?"

"Nothing, he's just not what you expected."

"What do you mean?"

"You'll have to see for yourself."

"So, you're not going to give me a clue?"

"Not in the least!" Grace smiled.

Marie looked disappointed and gave her sad face, but Grace said nothing, just shook her head no.

“Send him in, and you know I’m going to get you for this,” she threatened.

Marie took a last look in the mirror. “What’s the use, he’s probably a dog. What am I thinking? The man is here for a job, not a date. Besides, if he is a dog, it’ll make it easier to concentrate on work.”

After a light tap on the door, Kareem entered Marie’s office in aged dreadlocks, a full dreaded beard, Dashiki and sandals. He wore wire-framed glasses and carried an expensive satchel type briefcase. Marie was in shock; it took her all of thirty seconds before she could speak. To play it off, she coughed a little and cleared her throat.

“Hi,” she said extending her hand. “I’m Marie Perry, please, take a seat.”

“I hope I’m not too early,” Kareem said.

“No, it’s fine. I see you made it here on your own.”

“I’m good with directions.”

“Can I get you anything?”

“No, thank you, Grace has taken care of it.”

“How long have you been practicing law?”

“Long enough!” Kareem answered.

“Do you have references?”

“Yes, they’re in the pocket of my portfolio,” Kareem said and handed her the brown leather folder. He then folded his hands

and sat back for Marie's response. He was soft-spoken and quite modest about his accomplishments.

"My goodness," Marie said turning the plastic covers that contained a law degree from Yale and Atlanta news clipping from a prestigious case. Another clipping bared his picture with a group of children from a local boy's club, which he donated money to and a reference letter from an Atlanta firm. "I'm confused about why you would be interested in working here; it just seems to me..."

Kareem interrupted. "Look, I'm tired of all the flash. As a matter of fact, I haven't worked in nearly two years. My last case really took a toll on me. I took an extended trip to the Motherland, as you can probably tell (he referred to his hair), where I learned about my people, where I came from, the culture, the food, I even learned how to relax, enjoy life without all the stress the world puts on you.

"It's true that I had a good life. I made a lot of money, but I didn't like defending people that I knew were guilty. I didn't like sucking up to people I disliked and I despised those that tried to get close to me because of my image. I was moving way too fast and if I hadn't slowed down, there's no telling what would have happened to me," Kareem confided.

"The only problem was, after quitting the profession, and doing some soul searching, I found that I really missed practicing law, it was my passion. I now know that it was all the hoopla I got tired of. So, I figured, hey, if there is a way I can still practice

without all the bull jive, I should do it.”

“So, you decided to come to Oakridge, the smallest of small towns?”

“Why not? One of the great things about starting over in a new town is nobody knows anything about you. You get a fresh start,” he said.

“So, you were surfing the net, huh?”

“Yeah, I’d never even heard of Oakridge until I saw your ad on the Internet,” Kareem said.

“I’ll be frank with you, Kareem. Your references are impeccable, but…”

Grace entered the office with a tray. “I’ve got your herbal tea, nice and hot, no sugar or cream, I hope you enjoy it.” She batted her eyelashes and flashed a big smile.

Kareem stood when she passed the tea and thanked her with a compliment on the aroma. After she left, he blew into his cup and waited for Marie to continue.

“As I was saying, I don’t think it would work out for you here, at least not right now,” Marie said.

“I don’t understand.”

“I’m still interviewing, I’ll get back to you,” she said looking at his resume instead of him.

“You seem like a really nice lady, I don’t understand why you’re not being honest with me. There’s obviously something more you want to say,” he said.

“What do you mean?”

“You can’t fool me, remember, I’m a defense attorney. Just tell me what’s on your mind?” He sat his tea down, gave her eye contact.

“Kareem, I’m sorry. There is more, but I don’t want to find myself on the other end of a law suit for discrimination,” she said.

“Discrimination? Wait a minute; we need to talk, strictly off the record, of course.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

Marie hesitated. “You don’t, quite fit the profile.”

“The profile? What profile?”

“I know this is going to sound silly, but, it’s your appearance. I can’t let you represent my clients with that look!”

“Can you be more specific,” Kareem said with a serious tone.

“Well, Kareem, it’s your hair, it’s just not professional. In this business, image hooks them; victories keep them. I know you see my point?” She said.

“With all due respect, Miss Perry, it’s not what’s on my head, but what’s in my head, that counts,” he defended.

“Yeah, if anybody can get past your head, and those clothes. There’s no other way to put it; it’s distracting. I’m competing with a top shelf law firm directly across the street. This is a small town, Kareem, judges play golf with attorneys, bailiffs have lunch with court reporters, it just wouldn’t go over well,

believe me, I know. Did you wear this style when you practiced in Atlanta?”

“I was a few months into my dreds when I left the firm. I guess my hair grows fast; they just shot out during my trips to Africa and Jamaica. The brothers back there warned me that I wouldn’t truly be accepted in my own country, by the white man and sometimes by my own brothers and sisters,” Kareem said.

“It’s not about that, Kareem, this is business. You’re not in Africa anymore; you’re in America. If you want to wear that look, join a band or something, because no self-respecting law firm will hire you this way. Now, I’m sorry, I can’t help you here.” She handed Kareem his portfolio.

“All right, Sister, no need to get bent out of shape, I didn’t mean to come off with attitude, I apologize. I’m even willing to make a compromise.”

“What did you have in mind?” Marie asked.

“I’ll nix the Dashiki and sandals for Dockers, loafers, a fitted shirt, but no tie.”

“I don’t know, Kareem. What about your hair?”

“I keep the hair,” he said.

“The hair is the main problem. There’s no way you can represent my firm, or any firm for that matter, in court, with that look, it’s just not working ‘Bro-ther.’”

“Okay, what if I stayed out of court, worked in the office, sort of behind the scenes?”

“I really need someone in court,” Marie said.

“I can prove to be very useful. Depositions, background checks, and maybe some investigation, sort of a legal consultant. Don’t tell me you enjoy any of those tasks?” Kareem asked.

Marie twirled her chair to face the mountain view. She thought for a minute then turned back around. “All right, tell you what, we’ll try it for a few weeks. You’ll be a consultant, and I’ll expect the investigation work. You’ll be paid a regular salary, but the beard has to go!” She warned.

Kareem thought about her terms and agreed. He figured it might be better to start off slow anyway.

“Welcome aboard then.” Marie shook his hand. They agreed on working hours and salary. Benefits would come later if she decided to keep him on. She was surprised that Kareem was willing to sacrifice an attorney’s position for the sake of his hair and his pride.

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Later that evening, Grace held Marie to her promise to get out of the office and socialize. She knew her friend wouldn’t agree to a night on the town, so she settled for Happy Hour at “Nino’s,” an upscale bar on the 21st floor of their office building. It catered to the occupants of the building as well as other business-oriented people in the surrounding area. It also had a reputation of being a place where singles mingled.

Nino’s was crowded as usual. Thanks to Marie, the ladies happened on a table. She spotted a couple polishing off their drinks and moved in quickly. “Are you folks about to leave?” She

asked.

“Well,” he said checking at his watch, “We were going to have another, but I guess we do need to get out of here.”

“We certainly don’t want to impose,” Grace added.

“No, really, it’s all yours.” He grabbed his blazer while his companion plopped the cherry from her drink in her mouth.

The ladies sat for ten minutes before anyone waited on them. Marie became antsy and wanted to leave. Since she decided to rededicate herself to the Lord, she didn’t feel comfortable being in the bar. “What if the rapture came and I’m sitting in here,” she thought, but Grace convinced her to stay, she wanted to talk with her about something.

After their drinks arrived, a Virgin bloody Mary for Marie and a Shirley Temple for Grace, Marie filled her friend in on the details regarding Kareem being hired. Grace kept saying repeatedly through her laughs, “I can’t believe you hired him.” She could hardly believe it herself, she wasn’t so sure how it would work out, but she had to believe her intuition about him was right, that he was a good attorney and that he would eventually lose the dreads.

“Look over there, behind your left shoulder.”

Marie turned quickly.

“Don’t be so obvious,” Grace scolded.

“What’s the big deal, just a couple of guys?”

“A couple of cute guys. Check ‘em out girl. They’re looking at us.”

“Not interested, thank you.”

“What’s the problem?”

“Not my type.”

“How do you know? You haven’t even talked to them. What are you basing your opinion on?” Grace asked.

“You don’t want me to answer that,” Marie said.

“Yes, I do, Marie.”

“Just drop it, okay? And since when did they start playing rap music at Nino’s? It’s getting so you can’t go anywhere without hearing it.”

Grace loved rap music and took offense. She wondered how many insults regarding their culture and black men she’d endure before Marie finally pulled the chute and landed on solid ground. She didn’t want to argue, so she politely excused herself to the restroom. It was at these times she knew why she was Marie’s only friend, “Who else would put up with her?” She pondered.

As Grace passed the table where the flirtatious men ogled, the one she was eyeing got up and stepped to Marie’s table. It didn’t faze her one bit; she knew Marie would blow it before she could get back from the restroom.

The six-footer stood over her table, “May I buy you a drink?” His voice was suave.

Marie didn’t look up to show her disinterest. “No, thank you. I’m expecting my friend back at any moment.”

Persistent, he bent down, his breath on her ear, “Can we

talk while you wait?” His voice vibrated through her body, while his cologne tickled her senses.

She wanted to look at him, but her neck resisted. “No, I told you.”

“Don’t be so mean, girl, I don’t bite.” He touched her hand, another sensation passed through her.

She turned his way. Her eyes were shy, but her words were not. “Did I say you could touch me? You really have a lot of nerve.”

“Excuse me, I didn’t mean to offend you?” He was sincere.

“Please, I’m not trying to meet anybody. My girl and I are just here to talk; it would be nice if brothers weren’t all up in our grills.”

A white guy passed and smiled, she smiled and waved back.

“Oh, so that’s it! I ain’t got enough cream in my coffee?” He was sarcastic.

“What are you talking about?” Marie then stood to switch her off-balance chair.

“Baby, I’ve seen sisters like you before. Your high yellow behinds think your stuff don’t stink. Like you better than us black Negros, well I got news for you baby, that man don’t care nothin’ about you.”

“Excuse me?”

“You walk around all high and mighty because it took a

while before somebody in your family realized slavery is over and our women ain't got to crawl into bed with whitey..."

Before the brother could finish his sermon, Marie gave him a quick dis-slap the way Moe had done Curly on many occasions.

His eyes grew big from shock. His chest was puffed up; he wanted to beat her down.

She stared back into the stranger's eyes, not feeling an ounce of fright nor remorse as she held her ground. Nino's had quieted to a dull roar. It seemed as if everyone was holding their breath, hoping nothing more would transpire. She remembered what her father had said about a Mexican standoff; the first one to speak had surrendered.

"I apologize, I shouldn't have said that," he admitted.

Marie nodded, took her seat, downed her Virgin Mary and exhaled. Only then, did she feel her heart beating wildly and her knees knocking uncontrollably.

The tempo of the crowd returned to normal as Grace made her way to her seat. She noticed the brother's expression and had to question it.

"What's with him?" She asked scooting her chair under the table.

"Guess he doesn't like the word, no." Marie looked away.

"When I saw him standing over here, I thought you had reconsidered, I guess I was wrong." Grace laid her purse on the Formica table.

“That’s for sure,” Marie said.

“Hey, look at you, your drink’s gone.” Grace held Marie’s glass up high until she got the attention of the waitress. While she ordered another round, Marie asked the Lord to forgive her for losing her temper.

“Okay, so spill it.” Grace was anxious to hear about the Audrey situation.

Marie hesitated.

“What’s wrong with you?”

“Nothing,” she said, trying not to appear frazzled. She dare not tell what had just happened for fear of lending any credence to Grace’s theory of her not being attracted to black men. “Lord, forgive me again,” she said inside, fearing her getting closer to God would be more difficult than she thought.

“So, are you going to tell me about Audrey or not?”

As Marie told the story, Grace stared into her friend’s mouth until every word was uttered and then said, “Now, we got an attorney that can’t go to court and a legal secretary who can’t type? Girl, are you losing your mind?”

“Sometimes I’m not so sure,” Marie said. “But I’m not the only one who’s losing their mind.”

“Are you referring to me?”

“Yes, I’m referring to you. I can’t believe a smart, intelligent, beautiful person like you would fall for a married man. It’s a shame.” Marie shook her head.

“Oh, here we go again,” said Grace, her eyes rolled.

“Somebody’s got to talk some sense into you.”

“Look, he’s paying my tuition; I don’t see anybody else offering to do that.”

“But look at the price you’re paying for it. Sneaking around in secret, giving him your precious jewels, you can’t be with him on holidays, and look at it from God’s standpoint,” Marie reasoned.

“I don’t like the way things are, but I knew the situation when I got in it, so I deal with it. I’m not in love with this guy, it’s not like I’m wanting to marry him or anything, I’m getting what I need, and he’s getting what he can’t get at home,” Grace said.

“There’s other ways, Grace. You’re working, aren’t you?”

“If you paid me enough, I wouldn’t have to do it.”

The women were quiet for a moment. Grace felt bad about cracking on her salary and Marie hated she’d brought the situation up.

“You know I love you. You’re a sister to me. I’m only talking about it because I want what’s best for you. I don’t want to see you settling in the name of the all mighty dollar. It’s just like when you wanted to lose weight. You set a goal, set your mind to it and lost 68 pounds in less than a year. And every time somebody asked you how you did it, the first thing you said was, “By the grace of God.” If you would just trust Him the way you did then, the way you’re trusting this man is going to continue paying your tuition, believe me girl, you would have money and

much, much more.”

Grace’s eyes began to water. She widened them to prevent a tear from falling. “I love you too,” she said. “But you just don’t know how it is. You never had to worry about something like this. I didn’t have parents who cared enough to prepare for my future. And even if they wanted to, they couldn’t afford it. I know what I’m doing is wrong. It kills me to think what his wife must be going through, but I’ve gone too far now. I only have one more year, then, I graduate. Instead of answering phones, I’ll be an attorney,” she explained with passion in her voice.

“Grace, tomorrow isn’t promised. Who’s to say you’ll live to next year? What’s important is that you get right with God. If you were to die today, how do you think He would judge you?”

“Not so good,” Grace admitted.

“Girl, get rid of that fool. How can you trust a man that sleeps around on his wife?” Marie asked.

Grace eventually told Marie she was going to break it off, but Marie warned again, “Remember, tomorrow isn’t promised.”

“You don’t think I can break up with him, do you?” Grace asked.

“I know it’s going to take a little time...”

Grace began digging through her purse.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m going to break it off right now!”

“Over the phone?” Marie asked.

“Mmm, Hmmp. School’s out for the summer, it’s not

like I'm breaking into the semester," she said.

"That's not the point, you can't break up with someone over the phone, he needs to see you in person, so he'll know you mean it."

"Okay, I'll do it tonight, but I still have to call him to tell him where to meet me."

"Just make sure you don't meet him at any of your regular rendezvous. He won't take you serious if you say it in bed."

"No, I'll let him take me to dinner one last time, in a well-lit crowded place." Grace dialed the number.

"And don't get caught on the night you're breaking it off," Marie warned.

"Ooh, wouldn't that be a trip." She had to leave a message.

"You ready?" Marie asked and downed her drink.

"Yeah. To tell you the truth, I'm not really worried about tonight, what concerns me is what I'm going to do for next semester."

"You know I'm here for you. I'll help you as much as I can. We'll come up with a plan, God will see to that," Marie promised.